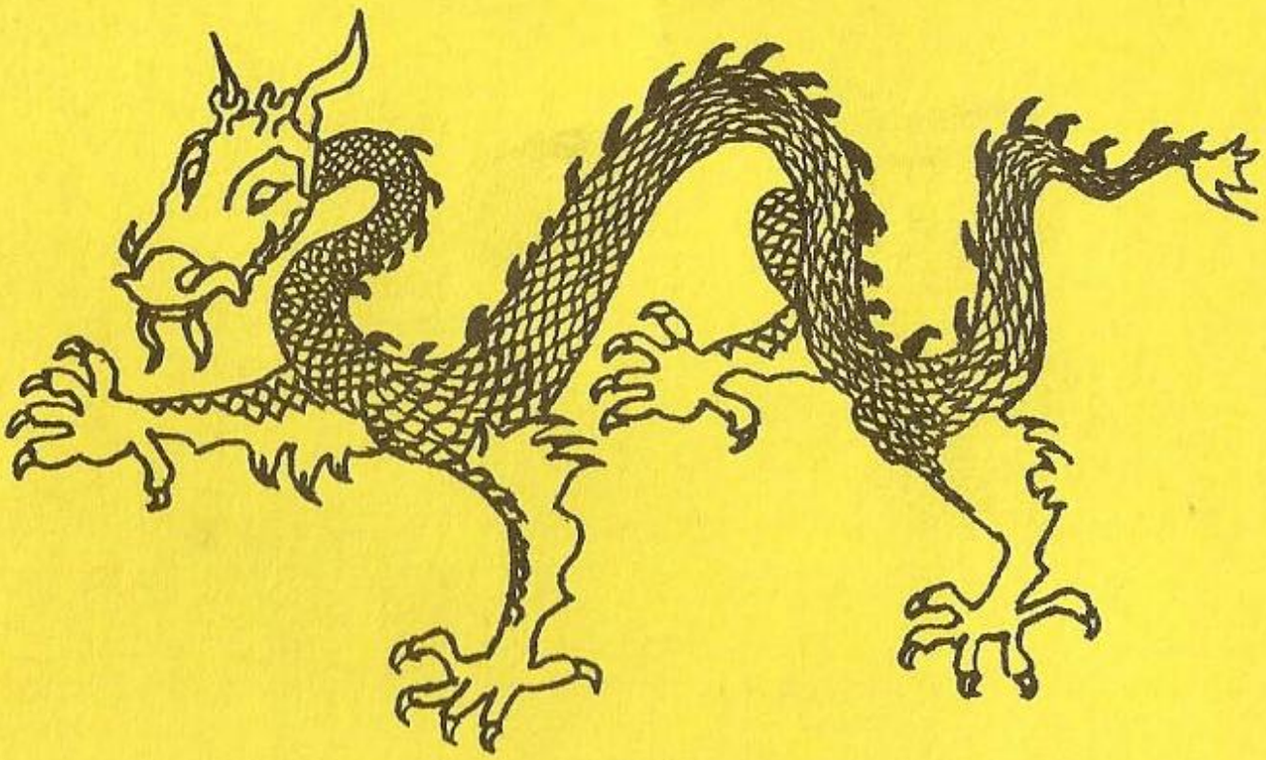
the ROHMER REVIEW



No. 10

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

With this issue *The Rohmer Review* completes five years of publication. It is an appropriate time for summing up, which we do with the inclusion of an index to the magazine's first ten issues. It is also a good time to tuck in a few loose ends left dangling in previous issues.

For example: in the editor's column in TRR #9 I had occasion to mention a newspaper clipping sent by Chris Steinbrunner, concerning a stage magician who used the name Fu Manchu. I have been chidden by several readers for not providing more information on this personage, or at least mentioning a source for such information. One such source is the excellent volume PANORAMA OF MAGIC by Milbourne Christopher (Dover Publications, #20774-9, 1962, $4.00). This is a collection of 295 playbills, posters, photographs, engravings and drawings, together with running commentary by the compiler, a past president of the Society of American Magicians, tracing the history of famous magicians and illusionists from ancient to modern times.

Moving back to issue #8, it will be remembered that one of the Dacoits in the photograph on page 8 (a scene from the Republic serial *Drums of Fu Manchu*) was left unidentified. The missing information was eventually provided by Don Daynard, of radio station CFRB in Toronto, who identified the actor as Budd Buster (*aka* Bud L. Buster). Other scenes from the serial---20 of them---can be found in issue #20 of *Those Enduring Matinee Idols*, Robert Malcomson's periodical survey of the sound serial. This issue also contains a seven-page plot summary of *Drums*, an interview with Henry Brandon (who played Fu Manchu), and an article on stuntman "Duke" Green, who played one of the Dacoits. *Those Enduring Matinee Idols* is available from the editor and publisher, Robert M. Malcomson (38559 Asbury Park Drive, Mt. Clemens, Michigan 48043), at $5.00 for six issues. Single copies of issue #20 are available at $2.00 each.

An even more detailed look at *Drums of Fu Manchu* is provided by a remarkable 20-page compilation of that title, one of a series of "Cliffhanger Ending and Escape Pictorial" booklets on the Republic serials. Chapter-by-chapter plot summary, an exhaustive list of cast and credits, and more than 130 scenes from the serial, are only part of the contents of the booklet. Copies *may* be available from William H. Desmond, a TRR subscriber and part-time dealer in movie material (803 East Fifth Street, South Boston, Mass. 02127).

(continued on page 8)

MEET DR. FU MANCHU

by

Sax Rohmer

Whenever I hear Big Ben striking I realize how important a part Big Ben has played in the adventures of Dr. Fu Manchu, for Dr. Fu Manchu first appeared in London within sound of Big Ben. Now I come to think of it, that deep old bell has run like a sort of London counter-melody through the stories. This was accidental; it had never occurred to me until the present moment. Perhaps the possibility of Fu Manchu's existence first dawned upon me in Limehouse, where many years ago I had an office. I used this office simply as a base of exploration. I was a journalist in those days, but preparing to become a fiction-writer——and Chinatown intrigued me.

I made many friends in the Chinese quarter, with its background of river noises, its frequent fogs, its sordid mystery. I found nothing to inspire romance. Then one night, and appropriately enough it was a foggy night, I saw a tall and very dignified Chinaman alight from a car. He was accompanied by an Arab girl, or she may have been an Egyptian, and as I saw the pair enter a mean-looking house, and as the fog drew a curtain over the scene, I conceived the character of Dr. Fu Manchu. In that hour, I believe, that old man of the sea was born.

That strange secrecy of the Chinese which underlies their native honesty, those invisible links which bind them, so that in any part of the world you will find members of the mysterious Tongs, this power, I said, controlled by a great dominating influence, a personality exceeding the normal, here would be a force which could upset Governments, and perhaps change the course of civilization. Beauty would be one of this superman's instruments. And the woman was beautiful.

He would be remorseless as an ancient Roman. As I walked on through the fog I imagined that inside that cheap-looking dwelling-house, unknown to all but the chosen few, unvisited by the watchful police, were luxurious apartments, Orientally furnished, cushioned, and perfumed, a spot of Eastern magnificence, a jewel inset in the fogs of Limehouse.

That night, alone in my room, I searched through my memories of the East, finding a pedigree for the girl I had seen in the fog.

From MEET THE DETECTIVE, edited by Cecil Madden, published by the Telegraph Press, New York, 1935. Reprinted by permission of Mrs. Elizabeth Sax Rohmer.

And she became Karamanèh, the unwilling slave and instrument of the Chinese doctor. Daylight was not far away when at last I had created Fu Manchu, a genius of princely rank holding degrees of three European universities. I had found as his opponent, Nayland Smith, an officer of Indian police, and I had selected (quite unknown to him) a friend of mine, a general practitioner, practising in a south-west suburb of London, as the friend and confidant of Nayland Smith.

We know in these scientific days that thoughts are things. When one makes a character one makes something which really exists, and so that night, or that morning, I knew that I had succeeded in the task which I had set myself; for, closing my eyes, I could both see and hear Dr. Fu Manchu.

He stood before me tall, lean, and high shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare's and a face like Satan; a close-shaven skull and long magnetic eyes of the true cat green. He spoke, and I listened:

"You have sought for and you have found me," he said. "I am here. You have followed me through the forests of Burma. You have tracked me to my palace in Kiang Su. Because you have made, you think that you *know* me. Do you dream that your Mr. Commissioner Nayland Smith can conquer me? That my mastery of the secret sects of the East can be met by the simple efficiency of the West? I shall prove a monster which neither you nor those you have created to assist you can hope to conquer... ."

He was so real that I answered him. One listening must have assumed that I, sitting alone in my room with the grey light of dawn just beginning to peep through the curtains, had become demented. It was not so. I had created something, and it was to the Mandarin Fu Manchu that I replied: "It will be a square fight, but a fight to the finish, Dr. Fu Manchu."

"A member of my family," he answered, "a mandarin of my rank, never breaks his word. For myself I ask nothing. I hold the key which unlocks the hearts of those who belong to every secret society in the East, including the Thugs. I command every Tong in China. My knowledge of medicine exceeds that of any doctor in the Western world. I shall restore the lost glories of China—*my* China. When your Western civilization, as you are pleased to term it, has exterminated itself, when from the air you have bombed to destruction your palaces and your cathedrals, when in your blindness you have permitted machines to obliterate humanity, I shall arise. I shall survey the smoking ashes which once were England, the ruins that were France, the red dust of Germany, the distant fire that was the United States. Then I shall laugh. My hour at last! Your Nayland Smith, your Scotland Yard, your Dr. Petrie, yourself, *all* will be blotted out. But China—*my* China—its willing millions awaiting my word—China, then, will come into her own. The dusk of the West will have fallen: the dawn of the East will have come."

"And you, Dr. Fu Manchu?"

"I shall be Emperor of the World!"

"And I ——"

"You?" He laughed——high, shrill laughter. "You will be forgotten with your Nayland Smith, your Dr. Petrie, and even my Karamanèh, your soldiers, your statesmen, all will be forgotten. But I, the Mandarin Fu Manchu, I shall go on, triumphant. It is your boast that you have made me. It is mine that I shall live when you are smoke... ."

So, you see, I had really created Dr. Fu Manchu. I had set him out upon his great march to conquer the Western world. I had challenged him to sweep aside the white races and to win domination for his own. Since thoughts are things, perhaps in my extravagance I had nevertheless made something not far short of what the future may hold. I sometimes wonder.

I have wandered far from the sound of Big Ben since that night when I brought Dr. Fu Manchu to life, and in the reluctant East, birthplace of the Mandarin doctor, I have sometimes thought that there was a greater wisdom, a deeper understanding of the essential things of life. But I am afraid I must close. I hope you understand Dr. Fu Manchu as I have tried to understand him. Perhaps one day he may conquer the world. It would be a queer world, but I am not sure that it would be any worse or any better than the world we live in. Big Ben? London? Would there be any Big Ben, any London, under the Empire of Dr. Fu Manchu?

Editor's Note:

"Meet Dr. Fu Manchu" is one of four accounts by Sax Rohmer of the origin of his most famous creation. It was originally written as a radio talk for the BBC, and was probably delivered on the air by Rohmer himself. It was published, along with other radio talks in the same series, in the book MEET THE DETECTIVE (Allen & Unwin, London, and Telegraph Press, New York, 1935).

If we may take Sax Rohmer's word that he used a medical friend of his as a model for Dr. Petrie, it is natural to guess that this friend was none other than Dr. R. Watson Councell (see MASTER OF VILLAINY and W. O. G. Lofts' article elsewhere in this issue of TRR). Perhaps Rohmer even used Dr. Councell's house as a model for that of Dr. Petrie... .

Rohmer's other accounts of Fu Manchu's creation are: "How Fu Manchu Was Born" (*This Week*, 29 Sep 1957; reprinted in TRR #2, Jan 1969); "The Birth of Fu Manchu" (Manchester *Empire News*, 30 Jan 1938); and Chapters 1 and 10 of MASTER OF VILLAINY. The catalytic glimpse of the mysterious Chinese and the Eurasian girl has also been mentioned in passing in several newspaper interviews. Shorn of its atmospheric trappings, this is probably as close to the truth as we will ever get. ■

Letter to Bransby Williams

SAX ROHMER, the popular Novelist, author of the "Fu-Manchu" Stories, etc., writes me as follows:—

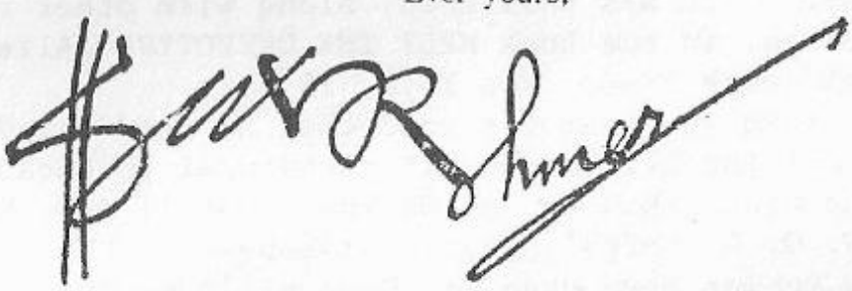
MY DEAR BRANSBY WILLIAMS,--It is with great pleasure that I hear of your intention of establishing a course of "Acting and Elocution." As you know I never cease to regret that, in these days of drawing-room actors, you do not occupy your proper and natural place as a London actor-manager. The art of elocution belongs, it would seem, to those dead ages which produced so many other things of joy and beauty; its place is with the memories, which we call Egyptian blue enamel, Chinese porcelain, and Greek statuary. Some few have rediscovered the secret—notably yourself—and I am happy to think that your admirable efforts may lead to a more general revival.

I note that you propose to deal with make-up and characterization. To-day you may well claim to be a great master of these. I shall never forget my first impression of your Mandarin in my poem "Orange Blossom." It equalled and took rank with those other and unforgettable embodiments of the characters of Charles Dickens which you have so wonderfully presented and shown to us that England's greatest humorist holds fast the hearts of thousands.

Yes! Teach England to talk. Make an end of mumbled speeches, muttered sermons, and put to shame the type of "actor" who entertains his friends in the front row of the stalls, but is, perhaps mercifully, as a dumb man to the listeners in the gallery.

All good luck. Every success. There are few of us, I think, whatever our vocations, who can afford to dispense with the guidance which you offer.

Ever yours,



Bransby Williams (1870-1964) was a distinguished British stage and film actor. Sax Rohmer wrote two "musical monologues" for Williams, The Pigtail of Li Fang Fu (1919) and Orange Blossom - A Chinese Tale (1921), both published by Reynolds & Co., London. The above testimonial letter was written to help advertise a course of acting lessons offered by Williams.

Reproduced courtesy of W. O. G. Lofts and Christopher Lowder (editor, I.P.C. [Magazine Division]).

The Imperial Dragon

by John E. Carroll

The dragon is perhaps the most commonly found animal motif in Chinese folklore and art. It has come to symbolize to Occidentals the very breath and Oriental atmosphere of Old China, an association reinforced through the wide distribution of Chinese art works, which found their way to the West after the collapse of the old feudal system and the Celestial Empire.

The symbolic use of and belief in the dragon by the Chinese people goes back many centuries, and may have begun through association with crocodiles which inhabited the banks of the Yang-tse and other rivers of China, in much the same manner as the ancient Egyptians began the worship of their Nile crocodile-god. Some scholars, however, connect the dragon with the python, or *mang*.

The dragon emblem was incorporated into the Imperial coat-of-arms in the form of two dragons fighting for a pearl. This insignia was in use from the Han to the Ch'ing dynasties. In those pre-Republican days when the dragon was the Imperial emblem, the Emperor upon his accession was said to "mount the Dragon Throne." He wore a robe whose brocade was embellished with dragons. This decor was repeated everywhere in his abode, and was on everything he used.

The Imperial Palace and many temples in Peking bear intricate designs of dragons, clouds, and the sun, carved into the middle section of each step leading to the main building. The dragon's great strength in supporting heavy weights led to his likeness being carved in the pedestals of tombstones and on the bases of huge monuments. The dragon-image can also be found on sword-hilts and prison gates, and moulded at the tops of bells and gongs---the sounds of the latter are said to be the dragon's cry when he is attacked by his arch-enemy, the whale. The dragon's propensity for literature and music is depicted in the imagery on stone tablets, on certain musical instruments, and in the carvings on the throne of Buddha.

It was under the Manchus that the image of a dragon on a yellow field became the flag of China.

The dragon is the incarnation of Tao, exerting a beneficent influence. The awesome dragon of mediaeval folklore has always been associated with the idea of evil in Christian and pre-Christian

legends, whereas the Eastern dragon is the symbol of strength and goodness, the emblem of protective vigilance and of the god-like forces which pervade Nature.

During the winter the dragon sleeps in inaccessible fastnesses in the mountains, or in the depths of the ocean. In the spring he awakens, to emerge and ascend to the skies, becoming one with the storm clouds, splitting the heavens asunder with his claws of forked lightning and bringing rain to the soil of China. At other times he lives in the swirling mists on mountain tops.

In deference to the *lung* dragon's known preference for the flesh of swallows, prayers for rain are accompanied by casting swallows into the water. In the forest areas of eastern Kirin in Manchuria, small crater lakes formed from accumulated rainwater are called *lung wan*, or Dragon's Pools.

The dragon is depicted in various forms: the Celestial Dragon, the protector of all things pertaining to the gods; the Spiritual Dragon, associated with the phenomena of wind and rain; the Dragon of Hidden Treasures, who guards treasures forbidden to mortals; the Winged Dragon; the Horned Dragon; the Coiling Dragon, representing various formations of the waves of the sea; and the Yellow Dragon, who emerged from the River Lo and taught the elements of writing to the legendary emperor Fu Hsi.

There are three species of dragon: the *lung*, which is the most powerful and lives in the sky; the *li*, which is horned and lies in his watery abode in the ocean; and the *chaio*, which is scaly and whose habitats are the marshes and mountain-dens.

Art forms of the *lung* dragon bear, in general, these nine characteristics: the head of a camel, the horns of a deer, the eyes of a rabbit, the ears of a cow, the neck of a snake, the belly of a frog, the scales of a carp, the claws of a hawk, and the pads of a tiger. There are whiskers on both sides of the mouth. Breath issues in a cloud, sometimes changing into water or fire. Beneath the chin are a beard and a bright red pearl, an appurtenance symbolizing the sun, the moon, thunder, and the pearl of power or night-shining pearl. (Some interpretations identify the "pearl" as a carbuncle or ruby.) Certain later forms of the dragon are furnished with the legs of a lizard, the talons of an eagle or of the large water monitor of South China, the mouth of a tiger, and the barbels of a catfish.

The dragon has the power to render itself invisible at will, but it is also deaf, accounting for the practice of referring to deaf people as *lung*. Each of the dragon's four legs has a diminutive wing-like appendage; and there are eighty-one spines along the length of its back, from head to tail, similar to the crest running along the tail of an alligator or crocodile.

From the time of the reign of Kao Tsu of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.), the five-clawed dragon was the imperial badge set aside for the exclusive use of the Emperor, his sons, and princes of the first and second ranks. Princes of the third and fourth ranks bore the emblem of a four-clawed dragon, while those of the fifth

rank, as well as certain officials, used a serpent-like creature with five claws.

In the second and third decades of the twentieth century the dragon imagery spread to the people of the West in the form of books and motion pictures with Oriental themes. The novels of Sax Rohmer are notable examples. On one occasion Dr. Petrie, dazed with drugs and imprisoned by Fu Manchu, finds himself in a Chinese room whose walls are covered with tapestries exquisitely figured with golden dragons that seemingly intertwine with each other. While lying on "a dragon-haunted desert of carpet," Petrie sees a table supported by legs carved like those of a dragon. The inscrutable Doctor himself rests against dragon-covered cushions.

In a further example, we read similarly of tapestries seen by Sir Bertram Morgan "in which red and gold ran riot, so that one lost the head of a dragon and failed to recover it again endeavouring to trace its tail."

The dragon theme is introduced in a different manner through the hallucinatory experience of Alan Sterling, in which he "sees" Fu Manchu riding on the crested head of a dragon or sea-serpent. Later, Fu Manchu is observed sitting motionless, his hands resting on dragon-carved chair-arms.

Gaston Max and Helen Cumberly have separate visual experiences of a golden dragon "crouched on an ivory pedestal" in the Cave of the Golden Dragon in the center of Ho-Pin's catacombs.

Rather strangely, the dragon emblem was never in evidence on the apparel of Sax Rohmer's most well-known creation: Dr. Fu Manchu almost always wore a plain yellow robe. (Exceptions to this rule were his numerous disguises, as well as the occasion in the secret cellars beneath The Gables when, soon after his admission to the Sublime Order of the White Peacock, he wore a green robe upon which was embroidered a huge white peacock.)

The dragon still holds an important place in the embellishment of catafalques at funerals and on the boat at Dragon-Boat Festivals. Special dragon-lanterns are carried at New Year festivals and during the Feast of Lanterns.

These many years later, and thousands of miles from its beginnings, the dragon continues to cavort amid throngs of celebrants of the Chinese New Year, and its antics will probably continue to delight on-lookers for many years to come.

References:

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CHINESE SYMBOLISM AND ART MOTIVES by C.A.S. Williams. Julian Press, N.Y., 1960

NATURE IN CHINESE ART by Arthur de Carle Sowerby, F.R.G.S., F.Z.S., John Day Co., N.Y., 1940

(continued on page 14)

(continued from Inside Front Cover)

The price is $3.00. But inquire first, to make sure the booklet is available, and include a postal card or stamped addressed envelope for the reply.

In connection with John Carroll's article "The Thugs and Dacoits of India" in TRR #8, readers will find much of interest in the book SECRET SOCIETIES, edited by Norman MacKenzie (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968, $9.95). Chapter 3 is a 20-page article, "Thuggee," by David Annan; chapter 5, also by Annan, is "The Assassins and the Knights Templar" (24 pages); chapter 6 is "The Rosicrucians" (22 pages) by Mervyn Johns, which includes information on The Golden Dawn, of which Sax Rohmer was a member; and chapter 9 is "Chinese Secret Societies" (32 pages) by Barbara E. Ward. The book contains many interesting illustrations and quotations from original sources. In recent months, copies have been offered at half price by Marboro Books, Publishers Central Bureau, and other remainder outlets.

Sax Rohmer's song-writing career, and his connections with music hall artists such as Little Tich and George Robey, have been mentioned in previous issues of TRR. Now, thanks to John Matthew of Toronto, we have news of a long-playing record which offers a souvenir from this part of Rohmer's life. *The Golden Age of the Music Hall* is on the Rhapsody label, #RHA 6014, distributed by President Records Ltd., London. It contains 14 music-hall songs performed by 11 artists, including both Little Tich and George Robey; Robey's selection is "Bang Went the Chance of a Lifetime," for which Sax Rohmer wrote the words.

Another actor must be added to the list of those who have portrayed Fu Manchu. This is Larry Martyn, who played the Devil Doctor, or perhaps an unreasonable facsimile thereof, in the TV play called "Elementary My Dear Watson" (BBC1 Comedy Playhouse, 18 January 1973). The play was written by N. F. Simpson, and was an exercise in surreal humor in the vein of Monty Python's Flying Circus or the Goon Shows of beloved memory. Mixed up in the proceedings, in addition to Fu Manchu, were Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Watson, Jack the Ripper, and Mother Goose. (Thanks to W. O. G. Lofts for the information.)

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THE POLITICS OF
Fu Manchu

by Jim Pobst

You recall the Yellow Peril? It is, of course, a venerable institution and like most useful inventions has reached that degree of prominence which affords it no extraordinary notice. If memory serves me well, a nightmare of some Kaiser or Tsar first brought it to the already superstitious collective mind of Europe. Subsequent propagandizing was furnished gratuitously by pamphlet, press, and most emphatically by popular literature.

The student of such trivia could easily uncover a thousand shilling shockers, dime novels and the like which deal in the clichés of the Oriental novel. The ancient idols, the opium dens, the secret societies and outré tortures which characterize such books are, whatever else they may be, a vivid backcloth for the plot, in the hands of an author with even the least amount of talent.

A good book called SCRATCHES ON OUR MINDS by Harold R. Isaacs (John Day Co., 1958) is an historical examination of North American images of China and India as gauged by a poll of academics and technicians. As in another such work, CHINESE CHAMELEON, the thesis is that the concept of the Oriental as criminal received a healthy strengthening (if it did not in fact originate in this way) from popular entertainment such as films, plays and books. Singled out as by far the most damaging influence is a series of books by one Sax Rohmer (Arthur S. Ward) which episodically relate the career of a certain Dr. Fu Manchu. Isaacs believes, but wrongly so, that the Oriental criminal, with "menace in every twitch of his finger, a threat in every twitch of his eyebrow, terror in each split-second glance of his slanted eyes" is perfectly represented in the person of the said Fu Manchu.

He goes on to say:

> Fu Manchu ultimately did die what seemed like a natural death in the years when the Chinese, as heroic fighters and allies in the war against Japan, commanded general sympathy. He has recently made another of his miraculous reappearances, trailing with all his absurdities in the wake of the more recently reviving and infinitely more sombre images of dangerousness attached to the Chinese.

Which is a hairy piece of writing in itself.

Reprinted from WAYFARER #5 (December 1970)
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I propose to examine some of the political undertones in the Fu Manchu series. I feel that close textual study of each entry in the history will prove Isaacs essentially wrong, and perhaps show that Rohmer read the Oriental character a bit more sympathetically than has been stated. His was a world of fiction and claimed to be nothing more, but the attentive reader cannot fail to find a morality implicit in each turn of events: tenuous at times, and coloured by politics, rationalism, and even a degree of intolerance, it can nonetheless be weighed, pondered and judged.

One aspect of the books in which this is evident (really the nexus of the series) is the confrontation present in some form in each book. This is a political and moral confrontation, with emphasis directed at clearly delineating the various postures of the central characters and (ideally) forcing the reader to choose sides. Kingsley Amis, in his invaluable JAMES BOND DOSSIER, is pleased to compare this with a stern Father/Son trial with curious *anti*-applications to Freudian transference and removal of anxiety. In these encounters Fu Manchu is revealed as a technocrat and pantechnicon, but primarily an aristocrat. Often the advocate and sole protector of culture, he is far from the shifty ethnic caricature that people like Isaacs claim he is.

The series begins, rather unpromisingly, with a disjointed novel written as if for a chapter serial. Fu Manchu, we are told, is "a fanatic" or a "duly appointed agent" and even an "emissary of an Eastern Power" whose ostensible mission it is to kill sundry persons who know the "secret of Tongking" or "the truth about Mongolia" or "the importance of the Tibetan frontiers". Described (in hyperbole) as "the yellow peril incarnate", he is said to have "the backing of a political group whose wealth is enormous, and his mission in Europe is to pave the way!" "!" indeed.

This is *Boys Own Annual* fare, and we have seen it before---secrets that are not really secrets, and murders that have seemingly no motive but effect. Even Homer may nod, but here Rohmer was positively snoring.

Well... Even as Fu Manchu is "symbolic" of the subtle, intangible power of the east, so Nayland Smith, "lean, agile, bronzed with the suns of Burma", is emblematic of "the clean British efficiency which sought to combat the insidious enemy."

Comes the confrontation, when at last they were "face to face ---the head of the great Yellow Movement" (which sounds much like a disease of the colon) "and the man who fought on behalf of the entire White Race." Here Dr. Fu Manchu's talk is of the Gods of Cathay, of wires and jackets and files and poisons and insects and instruments of death. With no less embarrassment Smith can speak of the "balance which a wise providence has adjudged between the white and yellow races."

Self-conscious stuff at best, but then, in the century's early years the world regarded emerging China, or Young China as the Hearst press stamped it, with some nervousness. The political orientation of Fu Manchu is quite shadowy here, except when Nayland

Smith attempts to separate the jumble of motives at the end of the book.

> These youthful and unbalanced reformers, in conjunction with older but no less ill-balanced provincial politicians, may be said to represent Young China. Amid such turmoils as this we invariably look for, and invariably find, a Third party. In my opinion, Dr. Fu Manchu was one of the leaders of such a party.

In the ensuing sequels this Third Party takes form as The Sacred Order of the White Peacock or Seven Group, and later as the Si Fan. A "giant conspiracy" which apparently had its birth in the province of Ho-Nan (where Fu Manchu is said to have ruled under the Empress Tzu Hsi), it was held by its detractors to be merely another "Chinese murder group".

Dr. Fu Manchu is clearly subordinate to certain others in the Group (and to one in particular, the mandarin Ki-Ming) who "dream of Europe and America under Chinese rule". The Si Fan is many times described as "that organization which dealt in wholesale murder, which aimed at upsetting the balance of the world". References are made, however, to some "giant, incredible scheme of [Fu Manchu's] own". In the confrontation that takes place during the events of the second book, Fu speaks wildly of "your prejudices---due to ignorance of my true motives", and desires specific Occidentals "to assist me in establishing that intellectual control which is destined to be the new World Force". Perhaps it is of this he speaks when, in THE GOLDEN SCORPION, mention is made of "a dreadful sudden menace, not of men and guns but of brains and capital".

Soon the good Doctor makes evident his schismatic plans when he disagrees with the mandarin Ki-Ming's desire to disturb "the balance of power". Fu wishes to coexist for a time with British Imperialism in order to forestall a Russian Empire. Just who is now the Si Fan incarnate, we are at a loss to discover, for Fu works both within and without the organization. "The Si Fan is a society older than Buddhism, and more flexible." And whatever its aim, it takes a dim view of Bolshevism: Russia was "stolen by fools".

Attend the confrontation:

> "It is a strange fact that only the circumstance of your being a prisoner allows of our present conversation... . My methods are not your methods. Perhaps I have laughed at your British scruples. Perhaps a day may come, Sir Denis, when you will join in my laughter. But, as much as I have hated you, I have always admired your clarity of mind and your tenacity. You were instrumental in defeating me, when I had planned to readjust the centre of world power. No doubt you thought me mad---a megalomaniac. You were wrong... . I hoped to awaken China. My methods, Sir Denis, were bad. My motive was good... . Your long reign, Sir Denis, is ending."

And now we are led further into the struggle of the fanatic Doctor. A grudging admiration begins to accrete over the positive mistrust the reader has hitherto felt. And Rohmer seems to be quite conscious of this feeling.

Dr. Fu Manchu is described with care and attention to the finest detail. Awful he remains (in the old sense of the word), but possessed of a fixity of purpose and decisiveness which put lesser mortals to shame.

We are dealing with

> ...a head which might have been that of Dante, a brow finer than the traditional portraits of Shakespeare....indeterminable age, heavily lined, narrow, slanted, brilliant chatoyant eyes....an angel, but a fallen angel....death mask of Satan... a carving of Gautama Buddha---by one who disbelieved his doctrine.

He poses, for a time, as the Marquis Chang Hu, and once, when jarred by his antagonists, his composure is shattered and frenzy breaks through. He shrieks of his "war against folly and misrule"; the "selflessness of my motives" and the "traditions to which I have always adhered". We begin to feel for the first time that

> definitely the world was awry; perhaps it was possible that this amazing man---for that he was an outstanding genius, none could deny---had a plan to adjust the scheme of things 'nearer to the heart's desire.'

According to *The New Yorker*, PRESIDENT FU MANCHU was the book wherein Fu Manchu changed his plans of conquest. As he reveals himself to Moya Adair:

> "Yet always I have been selfless... . My crimes, so termed, have been merely the removal from my path of those who obstructed me. Always I have dreamed of a sane world... of a world in which war should be impossible, disease eliminated, over-population checked, labour found for all willing hands---a world of peace."

Chuck in a vow to battle pollution and our boy Fu could top the polls. PRESIDENT FU MANCHU is by far the most political of the thirteen novels. In disguise, both Father Coughlin and Huey Long make guest appearances. And, in passing, it transpires that Fu Manchu, through his messing about with "gold reserves", has caused the financial crises of the 1930s.

Having hamstrung Wall Street, the Doctor and the Si Fan wage war upon those European dictators who would have war. Long ago, Fu Manchu had said, "The East has grown in spirit, while the West has been building machinery... . My new state will embody the soul of the East." Technology is now a threat and Fu fears that his people (one supposes China) will be sacrificed to the profiteers and madmen.

> "Poor infants, who transfer your prayers from angels to aeroplanes! ... Bringing every man's home in the firing line... Sir Denis, in striving to bolster up the ridiculous pretensions of those who misdirect the West, you have inevitably found yourself opposed to me."

And what of the Si Fan?

> ...always powerful, working for a dimly seen end, an end never appreciated by the West, today has become a mighty instrument of vengeance---and that flaming sword ... is firmly held by Dr. Fu Manchu.

Of Hitler (Rudolf Adlon in THE DRUMS OF FU MANCHU) Fu Manchu says, "Whatever his failings, the man was fearless." And of himself:

> "Always I am just....bound by codes stronger than bands of steel.... I command the obedience of an army greater than any ever controlled by one man. My power rests in the East, but my hand is stretched out to the West. I shall restore the lost grandeur of China.... When you have reduced to ashes your palaces and your temples...I shall set back the clock. ... Your Westerm world is locked in a stupid clash of arms... Shadows of Russia, that deformed colossus, frighten the children of Europe... German hordes overrun Europe."

It becomes harder to choose between good and evil, for the "white race" we met earlier seems to have blown its chances, and the "yellow race", once the villain without question, has turned into an admirable and orderly society. The perfected versus the infected.

The balance continues to tip. In the confrontation contained in SHADOW OF FU MANCHU, deep in that coffin-lined cellar, Fu Manchu tells Nayland Smith: "My mission is to save the world from the leprosy of Communism." And poor Smith, with his "dilapidated pouch, blackened briar and reflective look", can only stutter lamely, "I appreciate your aims. I don't like your methods." As another character opposed to the Devil Doctor puts it: "...in a way he has the right idea."

His overtures turned down by the Western governments, Fu Manchu, as President of the Si Fan, negotiates with the Soviet. He discourages rebellions in the provinces of China until the Russians are lulled into a false sense of security. "If I die...tonight, mankind will...not long...survive me." This is reminiscent of *Apres moi, le deluge*, as well as being a strong suggestion that he grows old. "Had Nayland Smith been my ally instead of my enemy, I should sit today on the throne of an empire greater than Rome ever knew."

The last book: EMPEROR FU MANCHU. Sad. Fu is now an anachronism---the fears are no longer shadowy. He no longer plans. Given tacit approval by Peking, the graduate of Heidelberg, the Sorbonne

and Edinburgh, the Lord of the Si Fan "fights for the same goal as Free China". The music is the same but the sound quavers; the words are forced; the old lion plays at roaring.

> "I shall restore this ancient empire to more than its old glory...and so I fertilize the human vines which are fruitful and tear out those which are parasites, destructive... . I do not strike at random. Only the guilty suffer... Communist fools...ignorant, power-drunk demagogues... . My methods in achieving [my] ideals are beyond your understanding... . My object is to crush Communism."

This confrontation is like a farewell. It takes place in a luxuriously appointed room, with Fu behind a lacquered desk strewn with objects foreign to him. He maintains to Smith that he has abandoned medieval methods, crudities and criminal acts. He recalls (in the fashion of old men) his early career; how his methods were regarded as 'unusual' in London, how he was branded a felon, and his politics, his sevenfold path to salvation, described offhand as The Yellow Peril. He curses "this Russian pestilence" and the "offal that pose as lords of China...my China". No one is convinced that he really hopes "to save not only the Chinese but the peoples of every nation from obliteration...[from] the insane plans of the Soviet". And persuasive guile fails with Nayland Smith, just as did physical torture some fifty years before.

The reunion of old 'comrades' ends. And the character of Dr. Fu Manchu and that of Sir Denis Nayland Smith retreat into that particular limbo reserved for curiosities of popular literature, for casualties of time and of taste---which, more than tide, waits for no man.

Their adventures were harmless. And yet they put some zest into what might have been boring moments in a great many lives. Taken seriously, they are impossible; but taken to heart, they are as delightful and perplexing as some old and yet ever-new puzzle whose solution has been discovered almost as many times as it has been forgot. And when it is all over, only the rogue or the fool is certain as to who, in that neverland or book-Earth, won or lost.

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THE RETURN OF DR. FU-MANCHU, ch. XXVIII (pp. 164-5, Pyramid ed.)

THE TRAIL OF FU MANCHU, ch. XIII & XX (pp. 55 & 75, Pyramid ed.)

FU MANCHU'S BRIDE, chapters II and XXVIII (pp. 11 & 176, Orient Edition)

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the ROHMER REVIEW

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THE BLUE SCORPION

by

Robert Weinberg

There are villains, and there are Villains. The difference, of course, is as that between day and night. It is not for Nayland Smith that we remember the Fu Manchu stories, but for that wonderfully evil mastermind, the good Doctor (and I don't mean Petrie!). But there are only so many Fu Manchu books, and when these have been read, one who is addicted to the stuff is forced to look elsewhere for his fix. For, doubt me not, such stuff is heady brew. After a short time we run out of imitations written by Rohmer himself and are reduced to such things as DR. NO and other pallid copies. Well, rejoice, fellow enthusiasts! In the musty pages of *Argosy* from the early 1930s, there was a villain who could have been a blood relative of the Yellow Peril Supreme. If Fu Manchu was the emperor of the Oriental villains, surely his right-hand man would have to be the Blue Scorpion.

Back in 1919 *Argosy* featured a series of four short novels about a wireless operator serving on American ships in the Far East. The stories, written by George F. Worts, were the adventures of Peter Moore, known as Peter the Brazen because of his reckless courage. (Peter was also known in Chinese as The Man of Bronze, a fact that might interest Doc Savage fans.) Peter fought a villain known as the Gray Mandarin and after a wild time finally defeated him and returned to America, supposedly to settle down and marry. Not so. In 1930 Peter returned to the pages of *Argosy* for a series of adventures which are among the best stories ever featured in that magazine of high adventure. Nearly every collector I've spoken with agrees that the second group of Peter the Brazen tales are in the highest class of action fiction. Unfortunately, though the earlier series was collected in hardcover form, none of the later stories has ever been reprinted. They appeared from 1930 to 1935, under the byline of Loring Brent (Worts's penname), and all are novelettes or novels. We are concerned here with the three encounters between Peter and the Blue Scorpion, but the collector is urged to find the other Peter the Brazen stories as well. You won't be disappointed.

There are three stories chronicling Peter's battle with the Blue Scorpion: CAVE OF THE BLUE SCORPION, a short novel in *Argosy* for 21 November 1931; STING OF THE BLUE SCORPION, a five-part serial beginning in the 19 November 1932 issue; and THE SAPPHIRE DEATH,

a six-part serial beginning in the issue for 10 June 1933. All three are cover stories, though only the first cover has any color or excitement (a scene of Peter staring at a knife embedded in the carpet, with the word "Scorpion" written beneath it in blood).

After a very mysterious short introduction concerned with the hidden Lake of the Flying Dragon, deep in the mountains of China, the saga begins as Peter Moore sells some mining machinery to a certain Mr. Wong. Peter agrees to deliver the machinery to the site where Mr. Wong plans to use it. Having concluded the business discussion, Peter returns to his rooms, where he finds his servant, Wan Lee, dying.

> The man's ears were gone. Blood was spilling in great thick bubbles from his mouth. His right hand had been severed at the wrist. ... [He] tried to speak [but] only thick, bubbling sounds came from his mouth. His tongue had been torn or cut out.

Wan Lee dies, after managing to scrawl out in his own blood the word "Scorpion."

The next day Peter meets his fiancee, Susan O'Gilvie, a spoiled thrill-seeking American heiress. He tells Susan what has happened, and reveals something of what he knows. It turns out that he is an expert on secret Chinese societies and beliefs.

> "The Blue Scorpion!" he said dramatically. "He's a kind of ogre, a myth, a legend of interior China. Certainly, the most powerful and most dangerous man in Asia. When you speak of the Shadow Over Asia, you're speaking of Mr. Lu."
>
> "Who?"
>
> "The Blue Scorpion. The man with the jade brain."
>
> "What?" Susan squealed.
>
> "It's the legend. Three hundred years ago, when he was a young man, he fell down the face of a cliff. He was picked up at the bottom, nothing more than a pulp. But a pulsing pulp. His face had been wiped off on the rocks. Most of his bones were broken. They say even his brains were oozing out... They say witch doctors gave him, in place of his brain, a brain of imperial, sanctified jade. There was upon him the sign of everlasting immortality. The jade brain possesses a quality of thinking that no human brain can possess."

Peter also reveals that Lu lives in a huge marble cave fortress beneath the Lake of the Flying Dragon, and that no man who ever sees the Blue Scorpion lives to tell of the experience.

Susan forces her company on Peter on his trip to deliver the machinery. Their destination turns out to be none other than the Lake of the Flying Dragon. Mr. Wong is in reality a Chinese warlord who plans to pump the lake dry and steal Lu's treasures. Peter and Susan are held captive and forced to help.

Susan is captured by Lu's men. Peter goes after her and rescues the girl from the cavern beneath the lake. They see Lu's treasures, the greatest fortune in the world. Wong and his men are wiped out by Lu's forces, but Peter and Susan escape back to civilization. Lu apparently does not care that they have eluded him, but he sends Peter a grim warning not to tell of his adventures at the Lake of the Flying Dragon.

> Within the neat sapphire box, side by side, were the embalmed heads of Bill Jacobs, Hank Roberts, and Tom Dove. But that was not all. There were also the hands of the three mechanics. And they were arranged in a very familiar, conventional Chinese manner. The hands of Bill Jacobs were nailed down with bronze spikes to his eyes. The hands of Hank Roberts were nailed down with bronze spikes to his ears. And the hands of Tom Dove were nailed down with bronze spikes to his mouth.

Peter makes Susan swear not to speak ever of the adventure in the Cave of the Blue Scorpion. He should have known better.

The plot of the second Blue Scorpion story is nearly a copy of that of the first. A psychiatrist tricks Susan into revealing what she knows about the Scorpion. The doctor, a man named Strang, hopes to hypnotize the Blue Scorpion after promising to repair his face. Assisting him is another mad doctor, Avery van Zandt. Susan has fallen into Strang's clutches while Peter is away, working on a dam for a wealthy Chinese in the interior of the country.

Strang reveals what he wants from Lu:

> "Mr. Lu is known as the Blue Scorpion for a reason. It is because of an amazing poison of which he alone has the secret. ... It is so poisonous that one drop placed in a stream will kill a man who drinks the water of that stream a mile below. [I say] that the man who knows the secret of that poison is the master of the world! I am going to be that man!"

Strang also mentions, almost in passing, that the victim's body turns a luminous sapphire blue, the brain turns to water, and the eyes turn black as coal. (A rather colorful poison!)

A hideous stunted dwarf makes several mysterious appearances. Dr. Strang's wife turns out to be an agent of the Scorpion. Strang has an army of coolies to help him, but they are wiped out in minutes by a horde of Lu's men.

Peter and Susan, captured by Lu, are brought into a room filled with brilliant blue light. A black room is revealed behind a secret door. Then a voice is heard, so cold that it sends shivers up Susan's spine---the voice of the Blue Scorpion. Thereupon Lu reveals something about Peter the Brazen that has not previously been mentioned, something that he has in common with Dr. Petrie:

> "You are a genius in the field of radio. You are almost a genius with other forms of electricity. ... I have amused myself by having your recent activities very closely observed. ... And I have merely confirmed my fixed opinion of you: you are almost a genius.
>
> "The trouble, Mr. Moore, is that the materials which are placed at your disposal are as crude, actually as useless, as the wooden toys of a river coolie's child."

Finding out about Peter's genius was nearly as much of a surprise as learning of Petrie's great medical talents in THE BRIDE OF FU MANCHU. But surely Petrie was never offered an opportunity like the one offered to Peter by the Blue Scorpion.

Lu reveals that he has known the secret of unlimited electric current for two hundred years. He is the total master of electricity. His current project [no pun intended] is the wireless transmission of power to any spot in the world: enough power to destroy a range of mountains ten thousand miles away! Lu wants Peter to work with him in perfecting the answer. He is sure that Moore will be able to solve the problem with his youthful enthusiasm. Lu's final goal, of course, is total conquest of the Earth.

Lu also threatens Peter and Susan with some rather horrible deaths by torture in case Peter refuses his offer. But in typical heroic style, that is just what Peter does. He then proceeds to escape with Susan and release a convenient flood which drowns Lu's forces.

Two adventures had ended in what could only be called draws. The third game would be for the match. THE SAPPHIRE DEATH is surely one of the wildest adventure novels ever written. Peter has decided to strike back at Mr. Lu. To do so, he must vanish from the face of the earth. Peter does so by faking his own death. Even Susan does not know that he is still alive. She begins to make her own plans for revenge.

It seems that Lu controls half of Asia by means of a secret religion based on worship of himself. Once a year, a contest is held to determine the strongest and bravest man in Asia. The winner becomes the high priest in Lu's temple for a year. At the same time, the most beautiful woman in Asia is chosen, to be offered as a sacrifice to Lu in a ceremony known as The Sapphire Death. Since Lu is to be present at the conclusion of the contests, and at the sacrifice, Peter determines to win the contest for strongest man, so that he can catch Lu by surprise and kill him. Unknown to Peter, Susan plans to enter the contest for most beautiful woman in order to have a similar opportunity to kill Lu!

Peter trains for the contest with the help of Dekka Lan Shan, a Chinese-American who had once won the contest but had changed his mind about the role of high priest when he learned he was scheduled to die at the end of his one-year reign. Dekka is a superhuman athlete, and trains Peter in his image. After six months of this training, Peter can fight boars, bears and panthers with nothing

more than a small club. He kills cobras with a knife. He learns to stay under water for more than seven minutes at a stretch. He becomes a master of unarmed combat, a veritable superman.

Disguised as an Oriental, Peter enters the deadly games. He is pitted against men who are almost, but not quite, his equal. There are scenes of incredible battle and deadly peril. At the same time Susan, also disguised as an Oriental, is moving through the ranks in the beauty contest. Her features almost transformed by her grief for Peter, she has becone one of the most beautiful women in the world. Throughout her trials, she carries a slim dagger, her one thought being to plunge it into the body of Mr. Lu.

Peter wins his contest, and Susan wins hers. The two meet in a small room at the top of the huge temple and are confronted for the first time by Mr. Lu,

> a man some inches over six feet in height, with the springy step, the carriage, the build of an athlete. ... Then Peter saw with shocked amazement that this man had no hands, that where his hands should have been were stumps, and that these stumps were capped with some white metal...[in which] were set sapphires, large ones.

Lu's face is covered by a sapphire mask, but Peter manages to see a long surgical plate built into the back of Lu's skull. Lu is as omnipotent as ever.

> Then a harsh inhuman whisper was saying, in English, "Miss O'Gilvie, why do you hesitate? Mr. Moore is waiting for you."

The Scorpion has known of their plans all along. Lu is angry at what to him are childish and ineffectual tricks. He tells Peter that he is going to kill him---in a match of physical strength. For as Lu puts it:

> "Perhaps you feel that you are the most powerful man on earth. Let me correct that mistake! ... I descend from my exalted throne for the satisfaction of proving that I am also your physical superior!"

Peter rips off the Scorpion's mask. His face is revealed for the first time in centuries. Or rather,

> there was no face! The Blue Scorpion, the oriental genius whose power was felt over all of Asia, was a man without a face! Where a face should have been there was nothing but a gray, flat surface of hideous scar tissue. There was a lipless gash for a mouth; two small holes lined with white metal where the nose had at one time been; higher up and further apart, two tiny apertures where the eyes had been. From the

latter glowed sparks; not human, not eyes, but bits of stark, flaming hatred.

Battle is joined, and Lu's boast proves all too accurate. Peter is no match for this Oriental super-fiend. Only the intervention of Susan and her dagger defeat the monster.

Lu's power is broken, though it is never definitely stated that the Blue Scorpion is dead. Peter and Susan escape, and go on to other adventures. Lu, while perhaps alive, is never heard from again.

So ends the saga of Peter Moore versus the Blue Scorpion. In this survey I have tried to give some of the flavor of the stories as well as describe the plots. However, the brief outline here is only a shadow of the actual stories. They are recommended without reservation. Perhaps Mr. Lu is not the equal of Dr. Fu Manchu, but he is far above any of the other imitations that have appeared. He should not be missed.

Ω Ω Ω Ω Ω Ω Ω Ω Ω

"Here are the blood-curdling noises of the 'Fu Manchu Mysteries.' The rain falls, the wind moans, an airplane roars. Helen Earle is running the water-fall and Urban Johnson crunches shoes in a pan of corn flakes." ⟶

(Publicity photo for the CBS radio serial which began in 1932.)

Photo courtesy of Jack Buck. Mr. Buck can supply the first 39 chapters of 'Shadow of Fu Manchu', a 1940 radio serial, on either cassettes or open-reel tapes. He also has film sound-tracks, H. P. Lovecraft material, and other items on tape. For information, write:

Radio Memories
Chamber of Horrors
71 McKinley Avenue
Dumont, New Jersey
07628.

Two new hardcover editions of Sax Rohmer books have recently been released by an old friend, Bookfinger. One is the first reprint of BIMBÂSHI BARÛK OF EGYPT since the original publication of that book in 1944; the other is the first U.S. edition of the occult novel WULFHEIM, previously published under the pseudonym "Michael Furey" in 1950. These books are available to TRR subscribers at the special price of $4.00 each. For those who may not have taken advantage of previous announcements, here is the complete list of Bookfinger editions of Rohmer books, and the special rates for TRR subscribers:

THE SINS OF SÉVERAC BABLON	$4.50
THE ORCHARD OF TEARS	$4.50
SALUTE TO BAZARADA AND OTHER STORIES	$4.50
THE EXPLOITS OF CAPTAIN O'HAGAN	$4.00
BIMBÂSHI BARÛK OF EGYPT	$4.00
WULFHEIM	$4.00

In addition, Bookfinger has reprinted three volumes in the much-sought-after "Gees" series of fantasy/detective novels by Jack Mann (E. Charles Vivian): GEES' FIRST CASE, GREY SHAPES and THE NINTH LIFE, priced at $5.00 each. For the future, Bookfinger promises an edition of Rohmer's SEVEN SINS and another "Gees" novel, THE GLASS TOO MANY. The latter, in its original edition, is so rare as to be almost legendary!

[Bookfinger/P. O. Box 487, Peter Stuyvesant Station/New York, N.Y. 10009]

The "Bibliographica Rohmeriana" column in TRR #9 hinted at the possibility of a new collection of Sax Rohmer stories. The possibility has become a reality, with the publication in February 1973 of THE WRATH OF FU MANCHU AND OTHER STORIES (Tom Stacey Ltd.). This is a collection of twelve short stories and novelettes, most of them new to book form. The title story is a Fu Manchu adventure which was not listed in the "Fu Manchu Checklist" in TRR #7; its only previous publication was as a five-part serial in the Toronto *Star Weekly* in 1952, under the title "Green Devil Mask." Fu Manchu fanciers will find it a strange story in a number of ways. The three previously known Fu Manchu short stories are also included in the book. The remaining contents are an assortment of fantasy and crime stories spanning the period from 1904 to 1953: "The Leopard-Couch," "A House Possessed," "The Treasure of Taia," "Nightmare House," "The Mark of Maat," "Crime Takes a Cruise," "A Date at Shepheard's," and "The Mystery of the Fabulous Lamp." The book is priced at £2.00. [Let me take this opportunity to disclaim responsibility for the typographical errors in my introduction to the book. The slight inaccuracy concerning the history of the title story---corrected above---*was* my fault.]

The British edition of the Rohmer biography MASTER OF VILLAINY was published by Tom Stacey Ltd., in time for Christmas 1972. Textually it is identical to the U.S. edition, but it has three advantages: the dust-jacket and binding are more dignified and attractive (no lavender dragon on a yellow background!), the photographs are reproduced on glossy paper, and the price of the book is only £1.95 (approximately $5.00).

Individuals may order copies of either or both of the above books from the publisher at list price plus a 10% surcharge to cover postage and handling. They can also be ordered from British booksellers; one that I can recommend for reliability and speed is Books Unlimited (see below). The F. and S. F. Book Company intends to import copies of THE WRATH OF FU MANCHU, but it is not known how soon they will be available, or what price will be charged.

[Tom Stacey Ltd./28-29 Maiden Lane/London WC2E 7JP/England]

[Books Unlimited/210 High Street/Prestatyn, Flintshire/England]

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Luther Norris, another old friend of TRR, has resumed publishing activities after a hiatus due to illness. The latest in his line of superbly produced chapbooks is GOODBYE, DR. THORNDYKE by Norman Donaldson (introduction by Allen J. Hubin; illustrated; $4.00). This is a fine pastiche of Dr. Thorndyke, by a man who knows and loves the original. (Donaldson's study of Thorndyke and his creator, R. Austin Freeman, is still available from Bowling Green University Popular Press: IN SEARCH OF DR. THORNDYKE, paperbound $3.00, hardbound $7.95; address below.)

Very limited quantities of some earlier Norris chapbooks are still available:

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in the 'twenties and 'thirties. And his grandson is John Newton Chance, well-known writer of detective thrillers and science fiction novels. The latter has used many pennames in the field of sf, and his book THE NIGHT OF THE BIG HEAT was made into a successful film.

THOUGHTS ON
THE MASTER OF VILLAINY

by W. O. G. Lofts

I remember, I remember
The house where I was born,
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn.

The opening lines of Thomas Hood's famous poem bring back no nostalgic memories to me. My birthplace was a late-Victorian ugly red-brick building with cold grey stone passages. There was only a courtyard paved with concrete to play in. At the age of ten I was absolutely delighted when we moved to a large house with a garden.

Sax Rohmer likewise, even if he had remembered his birthplace, would have had no happy memories of it. Rann Street, part of which still stands in the tough Ladywood district of Birmingham, has some of the original small red-brick terraced houses remaining. When I stood in Rann Street not so long ago, my thoughts went back to the year 1885, and I tried to imagine the area when Sax Rohmer was about two years old.

No person in MASTER OF VILLAINY impressed me more than Sax Rohmer's father, William Ward. He was obviously a deeply devoted father, dedicated to his son, and worked hard to provide the very best for the boy. I could imagine him coming home after long hours at the office, working for a few miserable pounds a week, and looking forward to seeing young Sax. To escape the obvious quarrels and upheavals caused by an alcoholic wife, William Ward would take his young son out into the bleak streets in the pram or pushchair.

Shortly after this time, the family moved to London: a few, probably well-used suitcases containing all their possessions; a trip to either New Street or Snow Hill station for the train journey to the capital city.

Memories came flooding back to me of my own schooldays — of a time when I was about twelve years old, at my school in St. John's Wood. We were in the prefects' room discussing the latest film we had seen at the local cinema. It had featured that great actor, Boris Karloff; the film in question was THE MASK OF FU MANCHU. It also featured Lewis Stone, who was to become famous as Mickey Rooney's father in the "Andy Hardy" films later on.

"Actually," said out Head Prefect, "Sax Rohmer, the author, is an Englishman. His real name is either Ward or Wade — even he isn't

sure which, nor does he know where he was born."

We listened in respectful silence, knowing that (since he was a literary scholar) what he said was probably correct. Our education had reached a level where we knew that "Sax Rohmer" was not an English name. Personally I always thought it Eastern European, as it had a ring of mystery about it——in just the way that one associates the name of Bela Lugosi with vampires, haunted castles and the un-dead.

Fu Manchu and mysterious Chinese became popular topics after that date. We visited Soho's Chinatown just off Piccadilly (Limehouse was too far away), and listened avidly to the Radio Luxembourg series of Fu Manchu adventures. The latter undoubtedly attracted many more listeners than the tame offerings of the B.B.C. Everyone in the 'thirties seemed to be cashing in on the popularity of the Chinese mystery theme. Boris Karloff played in a film series about Mr. Wong, the detective, and Roland Daniel was writing a series of books about Wu-Fang. (Even to this day the identity of Roland Daniel is shrouded in mystery. He is more elusive than even Sax Rohmer was in his heyday.)

There are some puzzling features in MASTER OF VILLAINY which it may be of interest to comment on. In a few instances I can add some details to those given in the book.

I feel sure that Sax Rohmer must have gone to school long before he was nine years old. The Education Act in England (passed in 1874) made it compulsory for children to attend school from the age of five (many started at three, including myself). Exceptions were made only for the chronically ill or seriously disabled ——and there is no evidence that young Sax was anything but a normal boy. Probably he attended a London County Council school at Clapham, and later went on to one of the day colleges.

Dr. Richard Watson Councell, who seemingly played such a large part in Sax Rohmer's life, was far from being an old man, as he is described in the book. He was only about twenty years older than Sax. In fact, when he died at Kings College Hospital on 15 October 1928, some years after the events discussed, he was only 66 years old. He left two sons, Eric Cunningham and Richard Basil; the former became a well-known dental surgeon.

Teddy Knox, the younger brother of Elizabeth, was indeed quite famous in England. He joined Jimmy Nervo to form the successful comedy team of Nervo & Knox (their building-ladder sketch was extremely clever). Later they teamed up with two other pairs of comedians and formed The Crazy Gang. This group became almost an institution, gave Royal Variety performances, with record-breaking runs of shows at the Victoria Palace, and made five films. Age finally caught up with them and they retired, although Teddy, who was ten years younger than the others, is still only 75.

Chance Newton, one of Sax Rohmer's friends, was a famous theatre critic, writing under the name "Carados". His son became an editor of such world-famous comic papers as *Chips* and *Comic Cuts*

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'Alf's Button Afloat', with the Crazy Gang (l-r: Chesney Allen, Charlie Naughton, Jimmy Nervo, Bud Flanagan, Teddy Knox and Jimmy Gold)

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

ROBERT WEINBERG was born in 1946. He holds a B.S. degree from Stevens Institute of Technology and an M.S. in Mathematics from Fairleigh Dickinson University, and is currently working toward his Ph. D. at Illinois Institute of Technology. He is due to relinquish his current bachelor status in May.

Bob has collected science fiction since the age of 11. For the past six or seven years he has been especially interested in pulp magazines in general, and the single-character pulps in particular. He compiled the first edition of THE HERO PULP INDEX in collaboration with Lohr McKinstry, and wrote the expanded Second Edition by himself. He is the editor of the quarterly magazine *Pulp*, devoted to (surprise!) pulp magazines and the characters featured therein. He writes material on pulps for several other magazines, and has delivered highly enjoyable slide shows on the subject at a number of conventions. He has written and sold some sf and fantasy stories to professional magazines, but not enough to consider himself a professional writer. He sells books and magazines in order to support his library of around 2600 items. And, he says, he is particularly proud of his pointed beard (it was round the last time I saw him) which gives him a slightly Satanic look.

[THE HERO PULP INDEX may be obtained from the publisher, Opar Press(C. E. Cazedessus), P. O. Box 500, Evergreen, Colorado 80439; $4.00 per copy. The magazine *Pulp* is available at $1.25 per copy from Steve Riley, 18 Norman Drive, Framingham, Massachusetts 01701; most of issue #3 is devoted to Captain Future; issue #4 contains a long article on Chu Lung, an Oriental villain from the *G-8* pulps.]

JIM POBST is a native of Canada, currently employed by the Penitentiary Service. He is editor and publisher of the amateur magazine *Wayfarer*, in which the original version of "The Politics of Fu Manchu" appeared.

[Back issues of *Wayfarer* #1-5 are still available, priced at 50¢ each. Address: Jim Pobst/Apt. 509, Louis Riel House/Simon Fraser University/Burnaby 2, B.C./Canada.]

Letters to Limehouse

From CAY VAN ASH, Tokyo, Japan:

For me, *Rohmer Review* #9 had some poignantly nostalgic moments. I felt pleased and at the same time sad to see Sax's personal scarab and typically illegible handwriting. You did a commendable job of transcription with, I think, only one error. The character in line 9 transcribed as "further" should really be "of my".

The *New Yorker* interview is also typical. This is not Sax talking to friends, but highly nervous, trying to give an imitation of Nayland Smith and present the image of himself which he thought (rightly, I imagine) that his readers wanted to see. He is studiously off-hand and shamelessly inaccurate. The piece by Captain Shaw gives a much more intimate picture. Incidentally, it is amusing to see Sax described as "small" in the one and "tall" in the other. As a matter of fact, he was the same height as myself---five feet eight inches. I had three of his old suits and a dressing gown, and wore them for years.

Mr. Galbreath contributes detailed and authentic information on the Well of Zem-zem. But, I wonder, has anyone got anything on "the deadly honey of Trebizond"? I have never heard of it, other than from Sax. I found that there were buses going to Trebizond from Istanbul, when I stopped off there three years ago, and was strongly tempted to go, but unfortunately I didn't have the time. (I did, however, score over Sax in one particular---I got to Ispahan, which he often mentioned but never actually visited.)

Mr. Lachman was kind to MASTER OF VILLAINY in his review. I can't, however, take any credit for the "wonderfully claustrophobia-producing account" of the Pyramid of Meydûm, since most of it came from the pen of Sax himself. I'm sorry to say that I never, personally, obtained more than a pretty distant view of the thing. My wife and I took a car out of Cairo and tried to get as close as we could, but Egypt---one year before the shooting war with Israel---was already a police state. They had checkpoints everywhere, and kept diverting us off the road. Apart from the commonplace Great Pyramid visit, the best we managed was to get inside the Northern Stone Pyramid of Dahshur (Edwards, chapter 3). But this was claustrophobic enough, and gave me some "atmosphere" to draw upon when I tackled the biography the following year.

By the way, it's a mere detail, but I think your reference to Meydûm as "the famous step-pyramid" on page 22 doesn't quite hit the mark. Edwards says that the pyramid was originally intended to be a step-pyramid, but the only real step-pyramid---the famous one---is that at Sakkara.

I'm amused by Mr. Lachman's suspicion that "a few of the episodes [in MASTER OF VILLAINY] are apocryphal, but I can't prove it."

Neither could we! We were, after all, dealing not only with a master of villainy but with a master story-teller.

Although it is only peripheral material, I have written to the publishers of the film magazine *Photon*, and also to Mr. Jack Buck, concerning tapes of the "Shadow of Fu Manchu" radio serial. The latter leads me to wonder if there is, anywhere, a recording of one of Sax's own rare appearances on radio or television. It would be very satisfying to hear his voice again. Adaptations of his work are, of course, only of secondary interest. But as regards his own writing, another field of inquiry occurs to me. What about the script of the television pilot film in which Cedric Hardwicke, John Newman and Rita Gam took part? [NBC, 1950.] My understanding is that Sax and Elizabeth actually wrote this themselves.

Seeing that Sax evidently did more rewriting than I really suspected, I no longer feel quite so confident about the nature of the Lloyd's paperback of *10.30 Folkestone Express*. "The Crouching Man" was anything but a good story, and he might well have decided to rewrite it. 40,000 words would make a long novelette, but would still be only half his average for a full-length novel, so that he wouldn't have thought to include it on his list of his book-length work. I'm afraid that only discovery of an actual copy of the paperback will settle the matter.

Thank you for reminding me that "Serpent Wind" appears in BIMBÂSHI BARÛK OF EGYPT. Nobody should have known this better than I, since I typed all the manuscripts for this book. But "Serpent Wind" had such an involved history that I ended up by becoming confused myself. Just before the war, as you know, Sax and Elizabeth completed the script of a comedy murder mystery play titled THE BODY'S UPSTAIRS. Later, this having failed to materialise on the stage, he used the murder plot and some of the characters in "Serpent Wind". This, naturally, was much shorter and did not include most of the dialogue and comedy situations. It was wartime, during our "siege of Little Gatton", and the story made heavy weather. If I remember rightly, when it went out it was called "Khamsîn". *Collier's* wanted one ending and *Chambers's* wanted a different one, and it finished by being published with both. In due course, when it went into the collection of Bimbâshi Barûk stories, it became "The Scarab of Lapis Lazuli". But even that was not the end of it. After the war, Sax took the remaining material from THE BODY'S UPSTAIRS, wrote an entirely new murder plot to replace what he had used for "Serpent Wind", and converted it into a two-act script titled HANGOVER HOUSE. Finally, failing likewise to dispose of this, he expanded it into the novel of the same name.

The "Limehouse episode" in MASTER OF VILLAINY came from material originally written by Sax. As originally conceived, the book had been intended rather as a continuation of the "Pipe Dreams" series than as an autobiography. The episode could have been pure fiction, but I don't really think so. Although there seems to be no record, Elizabeth feels that there was a commission for an article

on Limehouse, and she recalls with particular vividness sitting anxiously at her bedroom window in Herne Hill watching for the lights of Sax's taxi as he returned from his nocturnal quests.

To my mind, at least, a rather powerful argument in support of the claim is the question as to why, otherwise, at just about this time, Sax started to take an interest in London's Chinatown. He had never shown any such interest until then. Even his previous crime stories had featured no Chinese characters, and he had more recently been concentrating on historical romances in the vein of "The McVillin". At the same time, he was working on the story of Severac Bablon---whom he first proposed to make not a "Jewish Robin Hood" but a vague personality called Osman Ra, of presumably ancient Egyptian lineage. "Mr. King" and "Fu Manchu" were a long way from his thoughts.

As regards the material contained in "Pipe Dreams", I may say that Sax never used sheer invention. But in order to improve the continuity, and consequently the readability, he took liberties with the chrolonogy, and often combined episodes which were actually widely separated in time and space. One of the first things we had to do when trying to adapt this material for the biography was to sort out the genuine sequence of events---and it took a lot of doing! The Limehouse article in the *Empire News* , in fact, covered both the "Fu Manchu" period, around 1911, and the "Honan" episode of 1919, plus a number of undated visits.

In the artistic line, Sax didn't do any painting, but he could use color. At least one of his pastels still survives. Certainly he seems generally to have preferred black and white. He did, among other things, a series of silhouettes. One of these appears as the figure of the Black Mandarin in the story of that name (in TALES OF EAST AND WEST). He also designed the Egyptian scarab seal featured in the same story. It was this design which he used to use on his personal notepaper.

The Golden Dawn was probably, as you suggest, the Rosicrucian society to which Sax belonged. I think it unlikely that he belonged to more than one. I gather that he was already a member when Elizabeth first met him. Subsequently, he found increasingly little time to devote to such activities, but Elizabeth said that she was not aware of his actually having discontinued his membership at any time, and he was still making occasional experiments in occultism during the 1930s.

From JAMES C. HAVARD, Macon, Georgia:

In the letter column in TRR #8 there is a reference to a napalm agent called Fu Gas. The name is spelled "Fougasse" in FM 20-33, *Combat Flame Operations*, page 49, a publication of the U.S. Army. Fougasse is primarily used around the perimeters of compounds to defend them against heavy attack.

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Front Cover by John E. Carroll

Drawing on page 15 by Bertrand Zadig

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